

READING GROUP GUIDE

FADE INTO YOU by Nikki Darling

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- (1) The protagonist Nikki includes a great deal of detail about her environment and the city. How does Nikki's community—her friends, school, and Los Angeles neighborhood—shape the way she understands her own identity? How does it affect your understanding of young Nikki?
- (2) Darling's writing style features nonlinear shifts between direct narrative and dreamy prose, with no chapters or other divisions. How does this style affect your interpretation of her story? Why do you think she chooses to tell her story this way?
- (3) Darling's unglamorous portrait of Nikki's home differs from the typical portrayal of southern California in pop culture. How does *Fade Into You* work to disrupt stereotypical representations of Los Angeles? Why do you think this is significant?
- (4) *Fade Into You* highlights young Nikki's navigation of what it means to be biracial. She feels a clash between her two identities (Mexican and white), leaving her with no strong sense of belonging to either. How does your understanding and previous knowledge of Mexican and Mexican-American culture affect how you think about Nikki's conflicting identity?
- (5) The first of the two quotes that serve as the book's epigraph comes from Gloria Anzaldúa, a scholar of Chicana cultural theory, feminist theory, and queer theory: "I wished I could become / pulsing color, pure sound, bodiless as she." How do you interpret this quote in relationship to the book?
- (6) Nikki and one of her peers brings up Riot Grrrl (61), a 1990s movement that encouraged girls to make their own statements—through art, music, writing, and other outlets—about the issues that they were facing. Throughout the novel, what do you see as the major social issues young Nikki confronts? How does she approach them?
- (7) Throughout *Fade Into You*, including the epigraphs—one from a Chicana scholar and one from a punk rock band—Darling places Chicana and Latinx culture and punk rock culture side by side. Why do you think Darling makes a point to always juxtapose the two? What does this juxtaposition suggest about the book's protagonist Nikki, and about current concepts of identity?
- (8) The book opens and closes on Claire Chang, one of Nikki's school peers, though she is not mentioned much throughout the novel. What function does Claire play in the story? Why is she important to Nikki?

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(9) It's not uncommon for young girls to be taught by society, or teach themselves, to shrink themselves—their emotions, goals, and sexuality. Throughout *Fade Into You*, it becomes clear that Nikki's education, family, and future are more important to her than she lets her friends believe. Does her carefree façade hinder her success, or it is necessary as a defense or coping mechanism?

(10) How do you interpret the title of the book? Who or what do you believe is doing the “fading” and who do you see as the “you” they are fading into?

(11) Late in the novel, Nikki reveals that one of her sisters committed suicide when Nikki was five years old (175). Why do you think Darling waits until the end to mention such a life-altering event? Nikki goes on to speculate that writing about her sister's suicide is a way “to make sure it ever happened” (176). Discuss the role played by writing, both fiction and nonfiction, in how we relate to and think about the past.